NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

The pope's empty words to Ireland

Sr. Maureen Paul Turlish | Feb. 19, 2010

Sr. Maureen Paul Turlish

Commentary

Pope Benedict's repetition over and over again that the sexual abuse of a child is "a heinous crime" and "a grave sin which offends God and wounds the dignity of the human person created in his image," in country after country may, to use Bishop Diarmuid Martin's words, "even be empty."

I agree with Michael O'Brien of Right to Peace in Ireland, who said, "It's unbelievable what we heard today from the pope, this is the man who is in charge of the Catholic church worldwide and he hadn't even the gumption to say he was sorry for what happened to us.

"All he's done now is to add salt to the wounds, and this is very hurtful," he added. "We were expecting something and we got nothing."

While the Roman Catholic church in Ireland has its own variation of child abuse perpetrated by clergy and religious, the underlying causes are much the same in Ireland as they are in the United States, Canada, Australia and Germany as well as other European and African countries.

The problems are endemic and systemic to the hierarchical and governmental systems of the Roman Catholic church. They are certainly not peculiar to Ireland.

It is not as if Pope Benedict XVI as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Holy Office, does not have the most extensive background in the history of the church's sexual abuse problems involving children, young boys, girls and vulnerable adults which also includes women religious and younger members of religious communities like the Legion of Christ.

Unlike his predecessor, Benedict does not have to depend on others for the facts, because he already has much of that information because of his previous position.

The problem was and continues to be the unbridled abuse of power and authority by an episcopacy that put what was the good name of an institution before the well being of its most vulnerable members.

Until or unless Pope Benedict acknowledges and addresses the governmental structures and policies that led to this terrible abuse of power by the bishops and other church authorities, an infinite number of words of

sympathy or shock will not be enough to assuage what those victim/survivors have suffered at the hands of abusers while others continue to suffer because of what they have learned about the criminal and immoral actions of the episcopacy.

The cover-up of the physical, sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse of children did not happen in a vacuum in Ireland any more than it happened in a vacuum in the United States, Canada or Australia.

The abuse happened. That's factual and cannot be disputed. In the United States, for example, it wasn't caused by the permissive attitude of the people in New England. It cannot be dismissed as an American problem, and it was not caused by the presence of homosexuals in the priesthood. Homosexuality does not cause the sexual abuse of children any more than heterosexuality causes the sexual abuse of children.

Rather the question that has to be asked and answered is what is wrong with the underlying governmental structures of the institutional Roman Catholic church that gave bishops license to act with such utter abandon of its most vulnerable members in countries worldwide?

What flaws in the fabric of the church contributed to the bishops actually enabling further abuse by transferring priests from place to place over many years while threatening and intimidating victims and their families? What allowed this conspiracy, this collusion to happen in country after country and on such a scale?

There should be some outline, a paradigm of reform and renewal included in the pope's expected pastoral letter to the People of God in Ireland.

Such a letter from the pope will be read very carefully by peoples around the world who expected something more substantive than just the words of sympathy and concern they received when the pope visited their countries, especially the United States where not one bishop was removed from office or criminally prosecuted because of his part in covering up for abusive clerics and enabling their continued abuse over long periods of time.

It appears now that such a pastoral letter to Ireland will not be forthcoming and that will be a tragedy because the People of God did have hope.

They expected more from those they considered leaders.

[Maureen Paul Turlish, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, is a victims' advocate and writes from New Castle, Del.]

Editor's Note: The full text of the final statement is here: Final statement of pope-Irish bishops meeting [1]

Source URL (retrieved on *04/19/2015 - 20:23*): http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/popes-empty-words-ireland

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/news/final-statement-pope-irish-bishops-meeting